

SCIRPUS LACUSTRIS (Linn.)

A USEFUL factor in the Palm Oil trade of West Africa is our common Sedge. Few plants have so wide a distribution. It occurs throughout nearly the whole of Europe, and flourishes in most parts of Asia, Africa, North America, and Australia; so that with the exception of South America and Malaysia, *Scirpus lacustris* may be described as world-wide in its distribution.

This universally distributed plant deserves notice chiefly for its use in cooperage. The stems are brought in great quantities—chiefly from Ireland—into Liverpool, whence they are shipped to the West Coast of Africa for caulking the Palm Oil casks.

These casks are generally made in England, and are shipped in pieces, so that ten occupy about the space of one, with the object of saving freight. On arrival at the West Coast the staves are put together and made oil-tight by the insertion where necessary of a piece of the culm of the stem of the *Scirpus*.

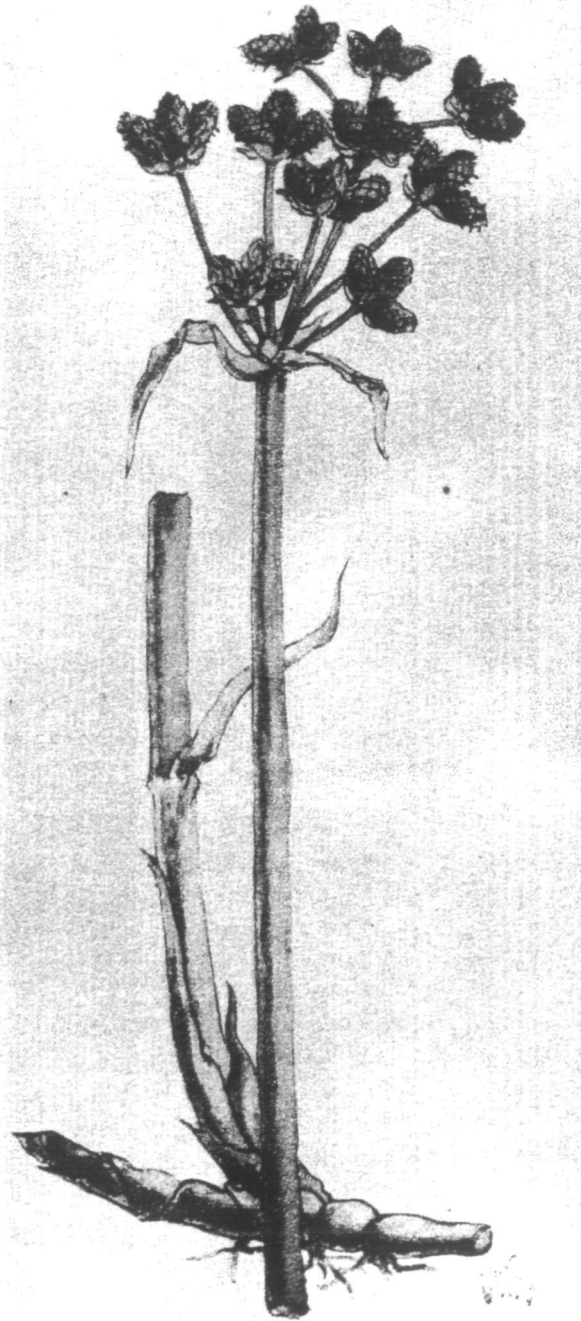
Incidentally it may be mentioned that the economic uses of this plant are numerous, amongst these being the manufacture of mats, baskets, bottle-covers, beehives, chair-seats, &c.

In a green state the culm is crisp and snaps easily. When dried it is tough, flexible and strong, but retains its hygroscopic properties, and swells out quickly when placed in water, a circumstance to which it owes most of its value as a plug.

Little is known of the distribution of this plant in Africa, but specimens have been collected in Sierra Leone by Afzelius and in South Africa by Burchell and Buchanan.

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